

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

HEADQUARTERS PROJECT Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Sacramento County, California

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes to develop a variety of wetland, riparian and upland habitats on the 331-acre Headquarters property to contribute to the habitat restoration and management objectives of Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The Headquarters property is located south of Hood-Franklin Road approximately three quarters of a mile west of Interstate 5 in Elk Grove, California.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating the proposed project was prepared by the Service (USFWS 2005). The Draft EA analyzed two alternatives and a No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative (Alternative A), agricultural activities on approximately 300 acres would continue and likely include the production of hay, wheat, alfalfa, corn or pasture crops. The Proposed Alternative (Alternative B) would restore approximately 150 acres of seasonal and permanent wetlands, 75 acres of grasslands and 25 acres of riparian habitat. Eighty acres would remain in agricultural production. The Grassland Habitat and Grazing Alternative (Alternative C) would restore approximately 300 acres to 80 percent native grasses.

The Proposed Alternative was selected over the other alternatives because the property has great potential to be restored and enhanced to support a variety of habitats and occupies a key location in the center of the Refuge close to transportation corridors (e.g., Hood-Franklin Road, Interstate-5). Also, the habitat restoration and management and recreational goals of the Refuge in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (USFWS 1992) and the type of funding used to acquire the headquarters property (i.e., Central Valley Project Improvement Act), support restoration and enhancement of habitats on the property.

Implementation of the agency's decision would be expected to result in the following environmental, social, and economic effects: (1) very slight to no effect on physical resources (air, soil, water, etc); (2) beneficial effects on biological resources with increases in wetland grassland and riparian habitats and associated species; (3) very slight to no effect on cultural resources (very slight effect only if new sites are found, but no effect on existing sites); and (4) very slight to no effect on land use with a portion of the Headquarters property remaining in agricultural production.

Measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the proposal as described below:

A letter was received from the California Farm Bureau requesting an environmental impact statement be prepared for the project addressing the loss of agricultural lands, the change in water use, and impacts on human food supply and the local economy. The Service appreciates the mission of the Farm Bureau to protect agricultural lands. However, this proposal is consistent with the FEIS (USFWS 1992) which addressed both

direct and indirect impacts (see section 5L-51 Mitigation Measures) of the Refuge on agricultural resources. The property currently supports winter wheat and approximately 80 acres will remain in farming, producing corn, wheat, safflower, and/or tomatoes. When contrasting the acreage of the Headquarters property (330) with total agricultural lands in Sacramento County (234,302 acres) that produce an estimated \$274.9 million annually in agricultural commodities (Sacramento County Agricultural Commission 2003), the conversion of this acreage would constitute a minimal impact on the agricultural economy of the county. Furthermore profitability for local farmers to produce field crops has been depressed for the last decade (R. E. van Loben Sels, pers. comm.). Wetlands would be designed so that potential seepage would not affect the ability of adjacent landowners to keep their land de-watered for farming. A buffer zone of approximately 200 feet would be maintained between the permanent wetlands and adjacent farmland and these wetlands will be created through excavation to minimize potential seepage.

The Service recognizes the benefits of many traditional farming practices for wildlife resources and has attempted to be supportive of the local agricultural community for the last ten years since establishment of the Refuge. The above-mentioned buffer zone along the western boundary of the property will ensure there would be no new restrictions placed on pesticide usage by adjacent landowners as a result of the project proposal. The Refuge also contacted the Sacramento County Agricultural Commissioner to evaluate historical pesticide use by nearby landowners. The Commissioner determined that the creation of new wetlands should not interfere with the use of pesticides by adjacent farmers (F. Carl, pers. comm.).

The Service will utilize the appropriative and riparian water rights associated with the Headquarters property and follow all guidelines set forth by the State Water Resources Control Board including Term 91 water restrictions, so that competition for surface water supplies during the irrigation season is minimized. Peak water diversion for wetland management will occur from early fall through early spring, in contrast to the summer irrigation season for farming. Seasonal wetlands will constitute the majority of the wetlands to be restored and will be drawn down in spring and only irrigated once or twice during the summer months for approximately 2-3 days.

The Headquarters property has been surveyed for cultural resources and all restoration activities will avoid any known sites. Additional monitoring will be conducted as needed during construction, to ensure that any previously-unknown sites are protected.

The creation and restoration of wetlands, grasslands and associated riparian zones would not increase weed infestations on adjacent properties because Refuge staff and cooperators would work to promote desirable and native vegetation and control noxious weeds as part of restoration and management of the property. Control of weeds and other undesirable vegetation would be conducted under the Refuge integrated pest management program that would include both mechanical (e.g., mowing, discing, etc.) and chemical treatment. Weed management is done routinely as part of annual maintenance on refuge units.

Wetland design would incorporate best management practices to minimize mosquitoes as outlined by Kwasny *et al* (2004) for the Central Valley Joint Venture and be coordinated with the Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District (Memorandum of

Understanding (MOU) between the Service and the Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District 1993). Project design would include features such as the ability to independently and rapidly flood and dewater wetland units and promote populations of mosquito predators. In keeping with the MOU, the Service has consulted with the District to ensure newly-created wetlands would not become a major source of mosquito production.

The proposal is not expected to have any significant adverse effects on wetlands and floodplains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988, because the anticipated slight effect of this project would be consistent with the impact analysis conducted in the FEIS (USFWS 1992; Vol. II, Appendix A). Specifically, the FEIS predicted the total effect of constructing all the wetlands proposed within the 18,000-acre Refuge project boundary on the 100-year floodplain elevation, would be only three inches and not significant.

The proposal is not expected to have any significant effects on the human environment because The quality of life for adjacent landowners would be maintained through: (1) additional plantings of riparian trees and shrubs along the Sacramento Drainage Canal and the shore of South Stone Lake, (2) collaborating with the Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito Vector Control District to minimize mosquito production, and (3) patrol of the area by Refuge law enforcement to discourage illegal activities (e.g. vandalism, littering, poaching, trespass).

The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment for 30 days starting on March 2, 2005. The Refuge received a total of one comment regarding the proposed project, which was opposed and recommended preparation of an EIS. All parties that commented on the proposed program will be notified through direct mailing that the Finding of No Significant Impact and Final EA are available on the Refuge website (<http://stonelakes.fws.gov>) and upon request from the Refuge. Parties contacted include:

Local landowners

Tribal organizations (Ione Band of Miwok Indians)

California Department of Parks and Recreation

Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District

Sacramento County Agricultural Commission

Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency,

Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Sacramento County Supervisor

U.S. Representatives

Sacramento County Departments of Planning and Transportation

Sacramento County Department of Water Resources

Wildlands, Inc.

California Waterfowl Association

Ducks Unlimited

Tremaine and Associates

Based on my review and evaluation of the enclosed EA and other supporting documentation, I have determined that the proposed Headquarters restoration project does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required. An environmental assessment has been prepared in support of this finding and is available upon request from the Service identified above.

Manager
California/Nevada Operations Office

Date

References:

Kwasny, D. C., M. Wolder, and C. Isola, 2004. Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture. 2004. Technical Guide to Best Management Practices for Mosquito Control in Managed Wetlands. Unpublished report for Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture. 35pp.

Memorandum of Understanding between U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito Vector Control District Concerning Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. 1993. 11pp. plus exhibit.

Sacramento County Agricultural Commission. 2002. Crop and Livestock Report.

Simons, D.D., D. B. Bignell III, and K. T. Tremaine. 2000. Archaeological Survey Report for the Samra Property, Sacramento County, California. Report for Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge by Tremaine and Associates, Inc. 38pp. plus site records.

Tremaine, K. and J.A. Lopez. 1997. Archaeological Survey for the Agri-Versified Property: Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Sacramento County, California. Report for Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge by Tremaine and Associates, Inc. 18 pp. plus site records.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1992. Final Environmental Impact Statement - Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Sacramento County, California.. Prepared for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by Jones and Stokes Associates, Inc.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2005. Environmental Assessment. Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters Project. Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Sacramento County, California. March 2, 2005.